

## ITINERARUM VITAE

### The Plan of Life

“As long as the active worker has not reached the point where he is *habitually recollected* and habitually *dependent on grace* -a dependence and recollection which accompany him everywhere he goes- he is still *not in a satisfactory state* of the interior life...a soul *cannot* lead an interior life without the *schedule*... and a firm resolution to keep it.”

-Dom. J.B. Chautard, O.S.C.O.; *The Soul of the Apostolate*, 198.

“I think, brethren, that you would like to know what is the state of the lukewarm soul. Well, this is it...it is a faith without zeal, a hope without [resolve], a charity without ardor...”

-John Vianney; *Sermons*: “The Dreadful State of the Lukewarm Soul”

### Background

- “Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by doing so, to save his soul...It follows that one must use created things insofar as they help toward one’s end, and free oneself from them, insofar as they are obstacles to it.” -St. Ignatius, *First Principle and Foundation*
- Your spiritual life, and therefore your sanctity, are, in an unqualified way, your first priority. This is true for all Christians: apostolic fruitfulness flows *directly* from the vitality of the interior life.
- You will never happen to stumble upon sanctity. The zeal, resolve, and ardor which are its fruits must be constantly (i.e. daily) and diligently tended.
  - “The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away.” -Mt. 11:12
- The Plan of Life assumes 2 basic and deeply interior premises:
  1. **That God is your first love**
  2. **That your relationship with Him must take a consistent and concrete, “incarnate” form.**
- My love for God is concretely “measurable” by the degree to which my will is disposed toward His at any given moment. His will is discernible by the general demands of my state in life (married, single, consecrated), and can be greatly simplified by a Plan of Life, which concretely manifests His will to me.
- The Plan of Life, therefore, can seem at first to be merely a “checklist” of “more things to do,” but understood rightly, it is actually a furnace that habitually burns away the dross of disordered self-love and self-will, and establishes a stable, concrete process of constant conversion toward God.

### Examination

- Consider if these two premises are *actually* true for you, or if they remain abstract ideals.
- Consider what the concrete demands of your state-in-life are, together with the demands of your personal circumstances. That these be done with excellence and with love is the way that God is desirous of receiving your love, and of making you a holy, fruitful priest.
- Where are my particular pit-falls? Do I tend to rationalize excusing myself from consistent times of prayer? Do I tend to avoid schoolwork/office work/apostolic work?

Am I disposed to neglect mortification/am I attached to comfort? Do I complain about my circumstances? Do I fear abandonment to Providence? Do I have habits of sin? Etc.

### **Possible Components for a Lay Person's Plan of Life**

**N.B:** These items are only suggestions. Only those items marked by (\*) are considered "non-negotiable."

#### **Daily:**

- **\*The "Heroic Minute:"** don't hit the snooze button and lay in bed/go back to sleep. Do violence to your self-will first thing in the morning.
- **\*Morning Offering:** Start the day in awareness of God, giving it all to Him. (See Supplement)
- **Office of Readings/Morning Prayer**
- **\*Mental Prayer** (absolute bare minimum of 15 minutes, twice/day. More where possible)
- **\*Prayer Before Meals**
- **Daily Mass with 5-10 minute Thanksgiving**
- **Angelus at Noon**
- **\*20 Minute Scripture/Spiritual Reading**
- **Visit to the Blessed Sacrament**
- **Evening Prayer**
- **\*Rosary**
- **\*Examination of Conscience**
- **Night Prayer**
- **\*3 Hail Marys for Purity** - on your knees, not in your bed.

#### **Weekly:**

- **Sacramental Confession**
- **Personal Study** (Beyond daily spiritual reading. Some specific area of study)
- **Leisure, Recreation, Exercise, Community**

#### **Monthly:**

- **Day of Recollection/"Desert Day"**
- **Spiritual Direction**

#### **Yearly:**

- **Retreat**
- **Continuing Education**

## Concluding Thoughts

- Sanctifying ourselves by offering our labors to God for love of Him merits us more grace, but merely being exteriorly busy/“productive” in life is not a substitute for spiritual exercises. “What good is it to gain the world and lose your soul?” Mt. 16:26
- Growing in availability to God’s will in each moment frees you from the anxiety caused by a burdened conscience, creating deep interior freedom, joy, and a capacity to love.

## SUPPLEMENT

### Some Recommended Further Reading

- **The Soul of the Apostolate** by Dom. Jean-Baptiste Chautard, O.C.S.O.
- **Christ, the Life of the Soul** by Bl. Dom. Columba Marmion, O.S.B.
- **The Practice of the Presence of God** by Br. Lawrence of the Resurrection, O. Carm.
- **The Spiritual Combat** by Lorenzo Scupoli, C.R.
- **The Sanctifier** by Luis Martinez
- **The Three Ages of the Interior Life** by Reginald Garrigou-LaGrange, O.P.
- **Introduction to the Devout Life** by St. Francis de Sales, C.O.

### Miscellaneous:

- **“The Heroic Minute.** It is the time fixed for getting up. Without hesitation: a supernatural reflection and then...up! Here you have a mortification that strengthens your will and does no harm to your body.”  
-Josemaria Escriva. *The Way*, 206
- **The Morning Offering.** After getting (rolling, dragging yourself) out of bed, get on your knees and devote your will and all your actions of that day to the glory of God.
  - “Lord, into your hands I abandon the past, the present, and the future. What has been done, and what has been left undone. Things of great importance, and things of little importance. Things temporal, and things eternal.”
  - “O Lord, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass offered throughout the world this day, I offer you all my prayers, all my works, all my joys, and all my sufferings, in reparation for my sins and for the conversion of sinners.”
  - Other customary prayers: “Angel of God...”; St. Michael Prayer; Hail Mary, etc.
- **Mental Prayer.** As much as possible, try to distinguish between times of mental prayer and times of spiritual reading. *Actually pray* during *prayer times*; don’t spend an entire Holy Hour reading a book and call it good. The Liturgy of the Hours is public liturgy, and naturally counts as prayer.
- **Examen.** The daily Examen is *absolutely indispensable* for a vital spiritual life and rooting out principle vices.